

January 27, 2015

Senator Dante Bartolomeo
Representative Diana Urban
Committee on Children
State Capitol Building, Room 011
Hartford, CT 06106

Good afternoon, Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and members of the of the Committee on Children.

I am Andy Russell. I am a resident of Connecticut, a marketing executive, and am here in my role as Advisory Board Member for Reach Out and Read Connecticut. I would like to lend my support for S.B. No. 209 An Act Concerning Funding for the Reach Out and Read Program. As a marketer, I have had the opportunity to help organizations such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art promote educational toys for young children. In addition, as a long time sports coach in Fairfield County, I have had the opportunity to teach and lead boys for many years. I have also been a board member of the Teen Center in New Canaan, Connecticut. I have learned about the need to engage early with young children and have experienced its positive impact. My commitment to the Reach Out and Read Program is based on my belief (supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners) that early reading with young children provides a tremendous platform for future success in school. This program takes advantage of a child's wellness visits to their pediatrician with their parents and enhances their experience through the introduction of books through the age of 5. The mission of Reach Out and Read is to make books a routine part of pediatric primary care so that children grow up with a love of books and reading, with a special emphasis on children growing up in poverty. The Reach Out and Read model is a scientifically validated model to promote literacy skills beginning at the early age of 6 months. Numerous peer-reviewed research studies demonstrate important positive outcomes when families receive books and guidance through the ROR program. These studies have been carried out in many states, with bilingual families, non-English speaking families and families for whom there are no books in the home language, yet the results are the same: Reach Out and Read families are significantly more likely to read to their children and to have more children's books in their homes. Children served by the ROR program show an increase of 4-8 points on vocabulary tests by the age of 2. For a two-year-old, this increase represents an approximately six-month gain, developmentally-speaking, preventing the "falling behind" routinely observed and measured in children living in low-income families.

No community in Connecticut interested in the health and welfare of its children should not be without access to the Reach Out and Read Program. The neediest of families want their children, in conjunction with their pediatricians, to have access to the best ways to support early learning. Please support the funding of the Reach Out and Read Program.

Thank you for your consideration.

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